







HER HUSBAND'S WIFE



VOLUME VI

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HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

A Comedy in Three Acts

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WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
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INTRODUCTION

It is never safe to take a serious man too seriously—nor a humorist too lightly. Most of the “serious” dramas of the hour are probably of less consequence than we sometimes, in our enthusiasm, suppose, and the more sprightly plays, even the farces, are often of considerably greater. Glancing back, for instance, over the past decade or two in the American theatre, the memory of many an ambitious and portentously solemn drama is, at best, but hazy, while our recollection of “The College Widow,” racy with its picture of life in a “fresh water” college, of certain comedies by Clyde Fitch, with their brisk etchings of urban butterflies, of some first act by George Cohan, lifted from the corner of Forty-second Street and Broadway, remains vivid and undimmed. The humorist (always excepting Mr. Shaw!) is seldom concerned with propaganda, nor burdened with a “message.” He has more time to give to his story for the story’s sake, and he is frequently a

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closer observer of individual types and eccentricities, of the play of character upon character, of the humors of the times, which are its manners. The public preference for comedy in the theatre is not wholly due to a distaste for high seriousness; in part at least it is due to the fact that the writers of comedy produce, on the whole, better and more vivid plays.

“Her Husband’s Wife” offers, perhaps, a case in point. Though it was written solely to be acted, with no thought of the printed page in mind, it has survived to be printed by virtue of its dramatic integrity. Frankly a whimsical farce, an “entertainment” in the most popular sense, individualizing observation, unforced humor, kindly feeling, a sense for style, preserve it for our more careful attention. It survives because it is a good play.

A. E. Thomas, the author, was born in the Berkshire Hills of Massachusetts, and was graduated from Brown University with the class of 1894. The following year he was an instructor in English at Brown, while securing his Master’s degree. He then took up newspaper work in New York City, laboring in that interesting if not always remunerative vineyard for fifteen years before “Her Husband’s Wife,”

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his first play to reach the professional stage, was produced. To be a reporter for fifteen years is to see much. To be a reporter for fifteen years and emerge uncynical and serene, however, is something of an accomplishment. To emerge, furthermore, with a sense for style still keen, and an undimmed zest for invention, is almost worthy of Peter Pan. Mr. Thomas thus emerged with "Her Husband's Wife" in his pocket.

The play was accepted by Henry Miller, who produced it at the Broad Street Theatre, Philadelphia, on February 14, 1910, with the following cast:

John Belden	.	.	.	Arthur Lewis
Richard Belden	.	.	.	Orme Caldara
Stuart Randolph	.	.	.	Robert Warrick
Irene Randolph	.	.	.	Laura Hope Crews
Emily Ladew	.	.	.	Grace Elliston
Maid	.	.	.	Nelly Roland

Rewritten slightly to make more prominent the part of Uncle John, and to introduce a new character, the Baroness von Marcken, as a foil to John, it was brought to the Garrick Theatre, New York, on May 9th of the same year, with Mr. Miller himself

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playing John, and Mabel Burt the Baroness. It ran in New York, first at the Garrick and then at the Criterion Theatre, until the July heat closed the playhouses. There was a subsequent autumn season on the road. The piece has been frequently acted in stock, ever since that time, and on at least one occasion by amateurs (the Comedy Club of New York) and promises to continue to be so acted.

The original version of "Her Husband's Wife" is the one printed here.

The reader will of course discover in the quaint character of Irene the source of the play's chief charm. Just what we mean by style in a drama is not always easy to say—certainly less easy than when we are dealing with the printed essay or novel. It is a fusion of many elements, of which mere language is perhaps the least important, though it has its place. But when we are considering a farce, a play in which the sequence of comic incident, the merry tangling of plot, determines the type, we may declare that style is or is not present according to the measure of humanity imparted to the characters, the amount of interest awakened in the people who figure in the incidents, the wit, delicacy, sprightliness of their speech; as well, of course, as according to the

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good taste and psychological value of these incidents themselves. Therefore, it is hard to say whether "The Taming of the Shrew" should be called a farce, so far toward comedy does its characterization lift it. And when we contemplate this quaint little hypochondriac, Irene, with her unknown ailments and mystic pills, especially as she was depicted by that capital comedienne, Laura Hope Crews, we are again hard put to say by just how much "Her Husband's Wife" misses comedy. Surely the interest is as great in the complications and final change in Irene's character as in the complications of the story; and that is due to the skill of the characterization, the humanity of the tale, the delicacy and sprightliness of the dialogue, far removed from the tone of door-slamming farce—in short, to the style.

Perhaps, as Mr. Walkley has somewhere said, we are giving up our old distinctions of comedy, tragedy, farce, and melodrama. Nowadays, we simply have plays. It is only natural that the closer the stage comes to life, the better our technique is fitted to create the illusion of reality, the less likely we are to write stage works set in a hard mould. Life is not so set, not even the quietest and most uneventful. Still, the old distinctions persist, and, like all tags, they

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are found useful—and, like all tags, they are abused. Our instinct is to catalogue “Her Husband’s Wife” as a farce; and yet, when we think of Irene, we distrust the term. Perhaps a more non-committal course is best. Gentle Reader—a good play!

WALTER PRICHARD EATON.

HER HUSBAND'S WIFE

Act 1

CHARACTERS

- STUART RANDOLPH A good-looking young husband.
RICHARD BELDEN His brother-in-law.
JOHN BELDEN . . The genial uncle of Irene and
 Richard
IRENE RANDOLPH Wife of Stuart.
EMILY LADEW . . Her friend.
NORA An elderly maid-servant.
PLACE: Saratoga.

All three acts take place in the drawing-room of the Randolphs during the racing season at the Spa.

ACT I

SCENE: *The drawing-room of the Randolph home. A door at L. 1 E. and another at L. 3 E. At R. 1 E. is a door, not used, in which is set a large plate-glass mirror. The entrance from the hall is an archway in the rear, right-hand corner. At the rear L. of C., are French windows, standing wide open and giving upon a comfortable veranda leading out to a lawn, beyond which is a spacious glimpse of cultivated landscape. A cuckoo clock hangs on the wall at rear. There is a grand piano in the rear, right-hand corner; upon it stands a silver frame holding a photograph of Stuart Belden. A small bench backs up against the piano. At L. C. is a table; against this, facing the audience, is backed a low, backless settee long enough to seat three persons. Chairs are at rear and R. and L. of the table. The curtains are of chintz. The floor is of hardwood covered with a handsome Persian rug. As the time is summer the decorations should avoid heaviness. An electric chandelier*

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hangs C. and well down. An electric switch at rear C. controls the chandelier. Fireplace and mantel at L. between the two doors.

TIME: *Early afternoon of a warm, sunny August day.*

AT RISE: *DICK enters through centre windows at back from right, crosses to table left upper, mixes highball, drinks. Enter NORA through arch with candlesticks.*

DICK. Good afternoon, Nora.

NORA. Good afternoon, Mr. Richard.

DICK. Where is everybody?

NORA. Oh! Everybody is everywhere, sir. Mrs. Randolph is in her room. The household expected you back last night, sir.

DICK [*Placing his hat on piano*]. Yes, but things were doing. Has Mr. Belden arrived?

NORA. Oh, yes, sir, yesterday. I believe he has gone for a walk with Mr. Randolph.

DICK. What is he like, a sort of an old bear? I haven't seen him in years and years.

NORA. No, not exactly. He's not exactly old, and he's anything but a bear.

DICK. Is everybody well?

NORA. Yes, sir—excepting——

DICK. Excepting whom?

NORA. Mrs. Randolph, sir. She's not quite herself.

DICK. Yes; I've noticed that for some time. You know, Mr. Stuart got an idea the salt air didn't agree with her—that is why we came here this summer instead of going to Bar Harbor.

NORA. Yes, sir, I know.

DICK. Suits me all right with my taste for the ponies, but it's knocked Stuart's yachting plans in the head. I must say he's been bully about it; not many men would do as much.

NORA. Ah, well, he adores her, you know, sir.

DICK. Yes, I know. Well—— [*Gets hat from piano.*] I've got to run over to the hotel a moment. If he comes in tell him I'll be right back. You know I've got a horse in Champlain stakes this afternoon—looks like a good thing, too.

NORA. I'll tell him.

[*DICK goes out through the French windows. Enter MR. BELDEN and STUART through the arch — STUART very warm, fanning himself with his hat; BELDEN quite cool. STUART sits on settee.*]

UNCLE J. Well, Nora, here we are again.

NORA. I see you are, sir.

STUART. I say, you hit up a terrible pace. I haven't walked that much in years. Do you do much of that sort of thing out on the coast?

UNCLE J. Ask Nora; she ought to remember.

STUART. Because, if you do, I'll stay in the East.

UNCLE J. Nonsense; a bit of a stroll.

STUART. Bit of a stroll! Do you know we walked six miles?

UNCLE J. Nonsense. Now to-morrow, Stuart, you and I will take a real walk.

STUART. This will do me for a while.

NORA. By the way, sir, Mr. Richard is back. Said he'd return in a few moments to go to the races.

STUART [*Turning to BELDEN*]. Yes, I know; he thinks Huckleberry's going to win for a change.

UNCLE J. What do you think?

STUART. Oh, I don't know much about horses. I like to see them run—makes a pretty sight—but give me yachting for mine. A wet sheet and a flowing sea, as the poet says. Wow! I'm warm in these clothes. You'll have to excuse me till I put on some others.

UNCLE J. My dear boy! Now, after I've had you in training for a fortnight——

STUART. Not for me. *[He exits L. 3 E.]*

UNCLE J. Well, Nora, where is my niece?

NORA. I believe Mrs. Randolph is in her room taking her deep-breathing exercises.

UNCLE J. I beg your pardon.

NORA. Taking her deep-breathing exercises, sir.

UNCLE J. What the deuce is that?

NORA. You'll see, sir, when you've been here a few days.

UNCLE J. Some tommy-rot or other, I suppose. It's no wonder, the life these people lead. See here, Nora, you've been with my niece ever since she was a youngster—tell me—what's the matter with her?

NORA. Matter, sir?

UNCLE J. Yes, yes. Tell me—is she quite as usual?

NORA. Quite as usual—how do you mean, sir?

UNCLE J. As to her health?

NORA. Well, sir, that's hard to say.

UNCLE J. You see her every day, you must have noticed some change in her?

NORA. Well, yes, sir. I believe I have.

UNCLE J. Tell me.